

# *Sketch*

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*Volume 41, Number 1*

1975

*Article 10*

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## To Father, in His Last Summer

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# To Father, in His Last Summer

Deborah Fitzgerald

## **Abstract**

you do not know, even as you sit here choking down the soupy eggs and toast which your thickened lazy throat will soon reject,...

# **To Father, in His Last Summer**

by  
**Deborah Fitzgerald**  
**English 3**

you do not know,  
even as you sit here choking down  
the soupy eggs and toast  
which your thickened lazy throat  
will soon reject,  
leaving, at the end of the counter  
a plateful of used breakfast;  
you do not know  
that while humming about the kitchen  
I compose a sad song  
of your death.

this summer,  
in the seventh year  
of forgotten muscles and  
a blood-soaked brain,  
your once ominously thundering  
goddamn it goddamn it  
is but a whisper,  
and the smile that responds  
to a grandchild's innocent concern  
easily falls  
to a trembling chin.  
a clattering cumbersome  
burro of steel carries you now,  
and you hold your fork  
in your fist.  
and a smooth plastic sheet  
fits snugly, securely  
beneath marshall fields florals.

old friends seem nervous  
as the guilt-ridden survivors  
of catastrophe.  
they pay their respects over whiskies  
and with gay desperation  
recall your illustrious career.  
but the whisky makes you drowsy  
and they shuffle smiling out the door  
stringing pretty lies in their wake.

when the crash came  
and the feds snapped the lock  
on your modest feedlot bank,  
when a hundred starving farmers  
wept to you of their dreams  
sitting now  
with rats and mold in the silos,  
when the strong brown bodies  
that knew all fears  
but halted for none  
finally let escape a reluctant quiver  
of despair,  
when a hundred forsaken men  
rushed, pounding on your windows,  
did you really  
build a castle of green bills  
on the muddy linoleum  
for the hungry stricken eyes to see  
and devour in relief,  
or have I invented  
this white knight drama  
for you  
for me . . .

when I was so small and unknowing  
and would trail you like  
a streamer,

the man at the post office  
would grin and goodmorning at us  
and crinkle his eyes and ask  
if I wasn't one of the granddaughters,  
and you would dutifully bristle  
and proudly respond that, no,  
I was an after-thought.  
and the man would feign astonishment  
and you would both finish  
laughing at the good joke  
that I didn't get.

a silly vignette  
is all I've saved of you  
somehow  
from those memories warped  
of time and space;  
they are mysteriously irretrievable.  
but  
like the greenblue smells of spring  
I recall too  
your brushing noon-time affection  
that mother misses now.

like a confused pigeon  
that remembers only routes  
but forgets the reasons why  
I return  
to retrieve something lost  
or revive something dead  
but watching you  
neglect this too.  
sadness saturates me here  
to see your heavy milky eyes  
look at me  
through me  
past me

vacating even your face,  
knowing now  
I cannot regret  
only the suggestion of emptiness,  
or the absence of the clinking  
where broken links disrupt  
the chain.

old man,  
your death thuds through my ears  
the words I've never heard  
or shall ever hear  
all the visions you too  
have forgotten.